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VISUAL ART DEVICES AND PARALLELS IN THE FICTION OF HENRY JAMES

BY VIOLA HOPKINS

NO BETTER "optical symbol" can be found for one aspect of Henry James than the photograph taken in 1906¹ showing him in top hat, cane and gloves in hand, bending slightly forward in the classic Daumier pose, taking in impressions of a painting. This is a portrait, however, not merely of the occasional James—the art critic, friend and befriender of painters, biographer of a sculptor—but also of the essential James—the master of the art of fiction. That his love of pictures and familiarity with the studio world were grist to his mill is evident in stories and novels such as "The Madonna of the Future" and *The Tragic Muse* in which his depiction of the artist and exploration of aesthetic questions are thematically central. Reflecting his experience of art less obviously but more significantly are the pictorial effects and art allusions permeating his fiction, both early and late. For though James was first and foremost a literary artist preoccupied with the problems of his own craft, his responsiveness to the visual arts was so keen, was so much an integral part of his consciousness, that it inevitably made itself felt in his literary technique. Clearly, a study of the pictorial aspects of his fiction is justified for the light it may cast on his method as well as on individual works.

Aside from his pictorialism, that is, his practice of describing people, places, scenes or parts of scenes as if he were describing a painting or a subject for a painting and his use of art objects for thematic projection and overtone, one may also raise the question whether in structure and style his novels resemble the works of a particular school of painting. What is assumed when this question is raised is either that all of the arts reflect in certain ways the pervasive "time-spirit" or that there exist certain families of style, for one of which an artist feels an affinity even though it is not contemporary. Thus, in the first instance, we might ask what did James have in common with the Impressionists and in the second, how is his style related to the Mannerists, the art of the past which impressed him most deeply? Just as metaphors communicate with immediacy the feel of experience in a way which abstract or discursive language cannot, comparisons between the arts serve to sensitize the reader to qualities in the works otherwise difficult to define, but each art having its own techniques and traditions, this critical approach necessarily becomes less and less valuable the more one tries to penetrate to

the formal, structural elements of the works being compared.² Therefore, my emphasis in this essay will be on James's pictorialism; only secondarily will I deal with the question of style and period affinities.

An outgrowth of James's habit of seeing a landscape or figures "composed" so that the scene appears to the spectator as a living picture perhaps recalling a real one or as a subject for a picture is his use of the "framing"³ device. Any scene or part of a scene may be considered framed if through visual imagery or description it is circumscribed and set apart from the rest of the narrative. Framing may serve various purposes: it may integrate description with action or with characterization, especially if the scene is presented through the consciousness of a character with a painter's eye; it may convey with great precision the particular tone of the setting or appearance of a character. Most important of all, it may symbolize relationships and underline themes.

Thus, the opening of *Confidence* consists of a series of scenes viewed pictorially, that is, as they are or might be seen by the hero, Bernard Longueville, who, having a "fancy for sketching," likes to take "pictorial notes."⁴ For example:

¹ This photograph by Alice Boughton has been reproduced in *Hound & Horn*, vii (April: June 1934), p. 478, and is the frontispiece to *The Painter's Eye*, ed. John L. Sweeney (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

² The following works have been especially helpful in clarifying for me the limitations of the comparative method in the study of literature and art: René Wellek, "The Parallelism between Literature and Art," *English Institute Annual*, 1941 (New York, 1942); G. Giovannini, "Method in the Study of Literature in its Relation to the Other Fine Arts," *JAAC*, viii (March 1950), 185-195; Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art, Ten Philosophical Lectures* (London, 1957); Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts, The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, 1958).

³ Though the definition is my own, I am indebted for this term to F. O. Matthiessen, "James and the Plastic Arts," *Kenyon Review*, v (Autumn 1943), 533-550.

⁴ *Confidence* (Boston, 1880), p. 1. As James's late revisions give a distorted picture of his earlier style, I refer to the earliest editions available of works prior to and including *The Portrait of a Lady*. As the revisions after that work do not seem crucial enough to justify using scattered and often difficult to obtain editions, for fiction that followed I refer to *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (New York, 1907-09) and for works not included in the New York Edition, to *The Novels and Stories of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock (London, 1921-23), abbreviated NY and NS respectively and incorporated in my text.

Longueville, every morning after breakfast, took a turn in the great square of Siena—the vast *piazza*, shaped like a horse-shoe, where the market is held beneath the windows of that crenelated palace from whose overhanging cornice a tall, straight tower springs up with a movement as light as that of a single plume in the bonnet of a captain. Here he strolled about, watching a brown *cantadino* disembarass his donkey, noting the progress of half an hour's chaffer over a bundle of carrots, wishing a young girl with eyes like animated agates would let him sketch her, and gazing up at intervals at the beautiful slim tower, as it played at contrasts with the large blue air.⁵

Note that though Longueville is said to be strolling about, the scene is described from the point of view of a spectator who remains at a sufficient distance from the market to be able to glance up to see the tower that dominates the scene. In the suggestion of movement—Longueville's walking about, the upspringing effect of the tower, the animation and sparkle of the girl's eyes—the scene is presented as a typical picturesque subject. As Heinrich Wölfflin has pointed out, “restless architectural forms” and “real movement” create essentially picturesque effects, and “there is nothing more picturesque than the busy crowd of the market.”⁶ While Longueville is sketching another picturesque scene, the heroine walks into his picture, into his foreground. Description becomes part of the action; the girl he sketches turns out later to be the same one his friend has fallen in love with in Baden-Baden. However, the hero's sketching propensities are not essentially a part of the story. Angela Vivian walks in and out of his life in the same way as she walked in and out of his “subject,” and finally stays in his life just as she became a part of his sketch, but his having an eye for the picturesque is chiefly a device to introduce the local color of Siena into the novel and to show that Longueville is clever and accomplished.

An art object itself sometimes provides the center of James's living pictures: “Travelling Companions” opens with the heroine, Charlotte Evans, and her father looking at Leonardo's *Last Supper* while they are being looked at by the hero. Similarly, in the first paragraph of *The American* we see Christopher Newman “reclining at his ease on the great circular divan which . . . occupied the centre of the Salon Carré, in the Museum of the Louvre” staring “at Murillo's beautiful moon-borne Madonna.”⁷ In one sharp visual image the theme of America confronting Europe is presented with immediacy and economy. Sometimes the *tableau vivant* comes as a climax to a scene, gathering together in one image its mean-

ing. A striking instance of this kind of framing occurs in *Roderick Hudson* at the conclusion of the dinner party given in honor of Roderick's successful completion of his first works. Coming back to the drawing room after seeing the ladies to their carriage, Rowland

paused outside of the open door; he was struck by the group formed by the three men. They were standing before Roderick's statue of Eve, and the young sculptor had lifted up the lamp and was showing different parts of it to his companions. He was talking ardently and the lamplight covered his head and face. Rowland stood looking on, for the group struck him with its picturesque symbolism. Roderick, bearing the lamp and glowing in its radiant circle, seemed the beautiful image of a genius which combined sincerity with power. Gloriani, with his head on one side, pulling his long moustache and looking keenly from half-closed eyes at the lighted marble, represented art with a worldly motive, skill unleavened by faith, the mere base maximum of cleverness. Poor little Singleton, on the other side, with his hands behind him, his head thrown back and his eyes following devoutly the course of Roderick's elucidation might pass for an embodiment of aspiring candor, afflicted with feeble wings to rise on. In all this, Roderick's was certainly the *beau rôle*.⁸

In the dramatic use of lighting and of expressive posture, this “picture” suggests a Caravaggio, though given James's dislike of seicento art the similarity in effect was probably unintended. What is more to the point is that a synthetic image is presented of the artist types and of what they represent; through the picture, the major art themes of the novel presented as table talk in the preceding scene are recapitulated succinctly and vividly.

In the later fiction, framing devices are used much less literally, more suggestively. Thinly motivated picture passages like the ones in *Confidence* all but disappear. What a character feels about a scene or person mingles with his visual impressions. While “the look of things” is not neglected, what we see is much more conditioned by the point of view. Description is presented more indirectly and made to serve multiple purposes. Thus, our first glimpse of Isabel Archer after her marriage is as she appears to Ned Rosier: “dressed in black velvet . . . brilliant and noble. . . . Framed in the gilded doorway, she struck our young man as the picture of a gracious

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶ *Principles of Art History*, trans. M. D. Hottinger, 7th ed. (New York, n.d.), p. 25.

⁷ Boston, 1877, p. 1.

⁸ Boston, 1875, p. 113.

lady.”⁹ In between the first visual details, however, and the image of her in her gilt frame, we are given the impression she makes on Rosier, who had known her before her marriage. It is as if James were interpreting a great portrait, touching on visual detail and decorative qualities but emphasizing the character that it reveals.

In contrast, the portrait of the Man with the Mask in *The Sacred Fount* is described in a straightforward objective fashion:

The figure represented is a young man in black—a quaint, tight black dress, fashioned in years long past; with a pale, lean, livid face and a stare, from eyes without eyebrows, like that of some whitened old-world clown. In his hand he holds an object that strikes the spectator at first simply as some obscure, some ambiguous work of art, but that on second view becomes a representation of a human face, modelled and coloured, in wax, in enamelled metal, in some substance not human. The object thus appears a complete mask, such as might have been fantastically fitted and worn. (NS, xxix, 44–45)

But its meaning is debated by the characters who are grouped before it. Is the man’s own face “Death” and the mask “Life” or is it the other way around? Is he taking it off or putting it on? Is the mask “beautiful” or is it hideous with an awful grimace? Does the mask really resemble Mrs. Server and the face, “poor Briss”? The conflicting interpretations which the ambiguous portrait elicits symbolize the central problem of reality and appearance. As Leon Edel has observed about this episode, “What has been underlined here for us if not the very theme of the book?”¹⁰

At moments of recognition in which sight merges with insight, the framing device is used to its greatest effect. Faced with the obligation of carrying out his terrible assignment for a cause in which he no longer believes and superseded by Paul Muniment in his relationship with the Princess, Hyacinth Robinson seeks out Millicent Henning in her shop “as by the force of the one, the last, sore personal need left him.” The futility of his hope of gaining solace from her becomes apparent to him when he comes upon Captain Sholto in the middle of the room, one of two figures in a tableau:

It next became plain to him that the person standing upright before the Captain, as still as a lay-figure and with her back turned to himself, was the object of his own quest. In spite of her averted face, he instantly “spotted” Millicent; he knew her shop-attitude, the dressing of her hair behind and the long grand lines of her figure draped in the last new thing. She was

showing off this treasure to the Captain, who was lost in contemplation. He had been beforehand with Hyacinth as a false purchaser, but he imitated a real one better than our young man, as, with his eyes travelling up and down the front of their beautiful friend’s person, he frowned considerably and rubbed his lower lip slowly with his walking-stick. Millicent stood admirably still—the back view of the garment she displayed was magnificent. (NY, vi, 423)

Likewise in *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly seeing Kate Croy standing in the French window opening on the balcony “very handsome and upright, the outer dark framing in a highly favourable way her summery simplicities and lightnesses of dress” “sees” that Merton Densher has returned from America. “Kate had positively but to be there just as she was to tell her he had come back” (NY, xix, 272). The earlier scene centering on the Bronzino is of this same type but more complex. Unforgettable is the climactic recognition scene of “The Jolly Corner” when Spencer Brydon is confronted by his *alter ego*, the person he would have been had he stayed in America. “No portrait by a great modern master could have presented him with more intensity, thrust him out of his frame with more art, as if there had been ‘treatment,’ of the consummate sort, in his every shade and salience.” And indeed the figure as presented could easily pass as a description of one of Sargent’s brilliant, slightly dehumanized and sinister portraits, such as those of John D. Rockefeller and Asher Wertheimer. Brydon “took him in . . . his planted stillness, his vivid truth, his grizzled bent head and white masking hands, his queer actuality of evening dress, of dangling double eyeglass, of gleaming silk lappet and white linen, of pearl button and gold watch-guard and polished shoe” (NY, xvii, 475). What is suggested is a pure optical image without depth or outline, all surface texture and the gleam of light. The framing device is used here to great effect: Brydon’s other self, who represented to him “the triumph of life” and who is outwardly as elegant as one of Sargent’s American financiers, when unmasked fills him with horror, so “evil, odious, blatant, vulgar” (NY, xvii, 477) is his face.

The richest, most fully developed of framed scenes in James’s fiction is the thirtieth chapter of *The Ambassadors*, the account of Strether’s excursion to the French countryside “into which he had hitherto looked only through the little

⁹ *The Portrait of a Lady* (Boston, 1882), p. 321.

¹⁰ “An Introductory Essay,” *The Sacred Fount* (New York, 1953), xx.

oblong window of the picture frame." He has hopes when he sets out that he may "see something somewhere that would remind him of a certain small Lambinet that had charmed him, long years before, at a Boston dealer's, and that he had, quite absurdly, never forgotten." He didn't, couldn't have afforded to, buy it but always remembered it as "the picture he *would* have bought—the particular production that had made him for a moment overstep the modesty of nature" (NY, xxii, 245–246). The picture itself, he realizes, might now disappoint him:

It would be a different thing, however, to see the remembered mixture resolved back into its elements—to assist at the restoration to nature of the whole far-away hour: the dusty day in Boston, the background of the Fitchburg Depot, of the maroon-coloured sanctum, the special-green vision, the ridiculous price, the poplars, the willows, the rushes, the river, the sunny, silvery sky, the shady, woody horizon. (NY, xxii, 246)

When he gets off the train he imagines himself walking into the picture: "the oblong gilt frame disposed its enclosing lines; the poplars and willows, the reeds and river—a river of which he didn't know, and didn't want to know, the name—fell into composition, full of felicity, within them; . . . it was all there, in short—it was what he wanted: it was Tremont Street, it was France, it was Lambinet." His past and his present join hands as he wanders about "boring so deep into his impressions and idleness that he might fairly have got through them again and reached the maroon-coloured wall" (NY, xxii, 247). Through the work of art which distills the essence of experience freeing it from irrelevant, distracting detail, he is enabled to grasp the essence of the scene before him and in turn through the living scene he recovers the picture. Still staying within the frame of the picture, he finally stops at an inn toward evening, and while resting, waiting for his dinner to be prepared, he perceives that "at bottom, the spell of the picture—that it was essentially, more than anything else, a scene and a stage, that the very air of the play was in the rustle of the willows and the tone of the sky." That is, the play in which he has been engaged—the drama of which the main characters are Chad and Madame de Vionnet, he and the other "ambassadors" from Woollett—has occupied the center of his consciousness here no less than it had in Paris. For on this ramble in the country even more than in Paris he has felt the quintessence of what distinguishes the "conditions" of life in France from those in Woollett.

The conditions had nowhere so asserted their dif-

ference from those of Woollett as they appeared to him to assert it in the little court of the Cheval Blanc while he arranged with his hostess for a comfortable climax. They were few and simple, scant and humble, but they were *the thing*, as he would have called it, even to a greater degree than Madame de Vionnet's old high salon, where the ghost of the Empire walked. "The" thing was the thing that implied the greatest number of other things of the sort he had had to tackle; and it was queer, of course, but so it was—the implication here was complete. Not a single one of his observations but somehow fell into a place in it; not a breath of the cooler evening that wasn't somehow a syllable of the text. The text was simply, when condensed, that in *these* places such things were, and that if it was in them one elected to move about one had to make one's account with what one lighted on. (NY, xxii, 254–255)

In short, in this scene framed by the Lambinet, Strether comes to a full realization of the meaning of his decision not to urge Chad to return to Woollett. The Lambinet that he had missed owning recalls the constrictions and deprivations of his past existence, the pleasures of the spirit and senses that had been denied to him. Seeing the landscape through the picture heightens his awareness of the complexities of European experience. In a world which so gratifies the "lust of the eyes"¹¹ and stirs the imagination, and in which nature is so inextricably mixed with art, what is clearly seen as immoral in the sharp New England light may have a different aspect and meaning.

It is especially fitting that the picture through which he sees the landscape should have been Lambinet. Guided simply by the desire to be true to history, James could have chosen any other of the Barbizon painters, for this was the French landscape school that discerning Bostonians were beginning to collect in the 1860's. James reviewed an exhibition in 1872 of privately owned paintings that included Rousseau, Daubigny, Diaz, Troyan and was held in the "rooms" of Messrs. Doll and Richards on Tremont Street.¹² Possibly this was the Boston gallery, as John L. Sweeney suggests, that James had in mind in describing "the sky-lighted inner shrine of Tremont Street" where Strether had his "aesthetic adventure."

But why Lambinet? What James said of place names applies here: "to name a place, in fiction,

¹¹ James used this phrase in describing his reactions to Paris in a letter of 1899 to his architect friend Edward P. Warren. See John Russell, "Henry James and the Leaning Tower," *New Statesman and Nation*, xxv (April 1943), 254–255.

¹² *The Painter's Eye*, p. 43.

is to pretend in some degree to represent it.”¹³ The naming of, say, Corot or Millet, two of the better known Barbizonists, would have entailed description suggestive of the popular styles of these painters—the blurred foliage and misty groves of the former, the pathos and social message of the latter’s reapers and gleaners. In effect any other minor landscapist would have served his purpose just as well, as long as the name did not require the kind of “doing” that would interfere with the general impression James wished to convey. It is the generic quality of this landscape school—the delight of these painters in the quiet moods of nature and their intimate treatment of it—that matters. Slow moving rivers that reflect a luminous sky and tangled willows, gently undulating meadows and winding forest paths, light filtering through trees—these are their recurring motifs; this is the “picture” James evokes of French “ruralism,” and this is a typical Lambinet. Also, how much more gently ironic is Strether’s having failed to obtain the work of a minor painter like Lambinet rather than of a master like Corot.

To what extent James consciously sought the effect I am about to describe probably cannot be determined, but it seems to me that when Strether enters the village where he plans to have his dinner, it is no longer a Lambinet which is being described, but instead an Impressionist canvas. First of all, the setting—an inn by a river with a pavilion “at the garden edge” almost overhanging the water, “testifying, in its somewhere battered state, to much fond frequentation” (NY, xxii, 255)—is one which the Impressionists were especially fond of painting. The boating party on the river, the open air dance place, the crowd in a cafe or a public garden—these were some of their favorite subjects. (In the synopsis for *The Ambassadors* that James sent to Harpers he refers to the setting as “a suburban village by the river, a place where people come out from Paris to boat, to dine, to dance, to make love, to do anything they like.”)¹⁴ When, at the opening of the next chapter, Strether sees “a boat advancing round the bend” containing “a young man in his shirt sleeves” and a lady “with a pink parasol,” it seems to him “suddenly as if these figures, or something like them, had been wanted in the picture, had been wanted, more or less, all day” (NY, xxii, 256). What we have here, however, is no longer, say, Lambinet’s *Le Passeur sur La Seine, près Bougival* but Renoir’s *Canotiers à Chatou* or Manet’s *En Bateau*. Lambinet’s figures are peasants, men and women indigenous to the country-side, dressed in rough everyday garb

and absorbed in their everyday tasks; Renoir’s or Manet’s are city folk—the men relaxing in shirt sleeves and the ladies stylishly dressed, wearing charming hats and holding parasols—enjoying the simple pleasures of the picnic excursion.

And it is not subject alone that suggests a difference. A comparison of descriptive phrases in the first part of the chapter with those of the latter part and of the opening of the next one reveals a significant change in Strether’s vision: “sunny, silvery sky, the shady, woody horizon,” “the sky was silver and turquoise and varnish; the village on the left was white and the church on the right was gray” (NY, xxii, 247)—this is how Strether “sees” initially. Color is presented through adjectives, and the light is represented as concentrated in the sky, not diffused throughout. That the horizon is “shady, woody” suggests a traditional aerial perspective in which objects at a distance appear blurred. In contrast, the primary emphasis in the description of the village where he stops for dinner is not on the thing modified by the adjective; instead, adjectives are converted into substantives, a grammatical shift which places the emphasis on the sensory quality of the visual experience rather than on the thing itself. “The village aspect” affects him “as whiteness, crookedness and blueness set in coppery green; there being positively, for that matter, an outer wall of the White Horse that was painted the most improbable shade.” Mme. de Vionnet’s parasol made “a pink point in the shining scene.” Color details are rendered with greater precision: the church is a “dim slate-color” on the outside; the stream is “gray-blue.” Distant objects are not described as if the perspective were conventional. “The valley on the further side was all copper-green level and glazed pearly sky, a sky hatched across with screens of trimmed trees, which looked flat, like espaliers” (NY, xxii, 254–257).

This very subtle shift from the description of Lambinet to that of an Impressionist scene reinforces the thematic development of the episode. The movement of the chapter is from Strether’s identification of the picture with the landscape to his grasp of the implications of the identity, from the past to the present. But his understanding and acceptance of its meaning are not tested until the encounter with Chad and Mme. de Vionnet; he is confronted with the moral of his “text,” which, as he had just interpreted it, was

¹³ *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, ed. Richard P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 8.

¹⁴ *The Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York, 1947), p. 409.

that if "one elected to move about" in this kind of world, "one had to make one's account with what one lighted on." Strether actually makes his "account" the next evening in the "high, clear picture" of Mme. de Vionnet's rooms; "he was moving in these days, as in a gallery, from clever canvas to clever canvas" (NY, xxii, 273). As can be seen, the movement from the "special-green vision" of a Lambinet canvas, low toned and idyllic, to the color nuances and pleasure trip theme of the Impressionist canvas corresponds to the evolution of Strether's experience which is climaxed by his discovery that after all "he was mixed up with the typical tale of Paris" (NY, xxii, 271).

The foregoing analysis of James's use of the framing technique is not meant to be exhaustive; other instances of this kind of pictorialism should come readily to mind to the alert reader and will be mentioned incidentally in the ensuing discussion. What I have tried mainly to suggest is the variety, richness, and increasingly subtle effects created by it. The same progression from description to evocation and symbolization can be traced in James's treatment of art objects and background in general. Early "European" stories like "A Passionate Pilgrim" and "Travelling Companions" are so overloaded with art description that one almost wonders whether James intended their interest to be in the description or in the story as a whole. Even the more economically constructed "The Madonna of the Future," reflecting though it does a more critical attitude toward the American who adulates European culture, contains unassimilated and overextended descriptive passages; Howells felt that one of the charms of the story was its "dissertations on pictures."¹⁵ Nevertheless, even the works of James's apprenticeship show evidence of an attempt to assimilate art details and action. For example, in "Travelling Companions" the hero's purchase of a spurious Correggio from a poverty-stricken Italian family serves more than one thematic purpose: the madonna portrayed resembles Charlotte Evans with whom the hero, influenced by the romantic atmosphere of Italy, imagines himself to be in love; and the incident in which the "so mendacious and miserable" but "so civil, so charming"¹⁶ Italians sell it to him is worked in with another theme—the painful underside of Italian beauty and picturesqueness. Pictures are also used throughout as a sign of sensibility: Charlotte is moved to recite a dozen verses from St. Mark's gospel when standing before a Tintoretto *Crucifixion*; her father prefers watching the

pretty women in the Milan cathedral to climbing to its top. *Roderick Hudson*, in spite of all of its faults, marks a further advance in this direction, for though it still has some of the copiousness of a guide book, the descriptions of places and art objects are much better integrated with the action. The scene in St. Peter's, for example, in which Christina is seen kissing the bronze toe of the holy statue is not only a touch of Roman local color but a sign of her capriciousness and flair for the dramatic. She had given no signs earlier of being that devout. By the time of *The Portrait of a Lady*, James was expert in conveying a great deal by a single stroke: when the again rejected Lord Warburton bids Isabel goodbye in Rome, the scene takes place in the gallery of the Capitol with the "lion of the collection"—*The Dying Gladiator*—in the background.

While James never exempted himself entirely, not even in his highly poetic and dramatic novels, from the novelist's obligation to satisfy the reader's visual imagination, he soon learned to practice a wise economy in fusing much of what is normally called setting with action and characterization. The art object is an especially important means of achieving this desired fusion, for it can be used simultaneously as a visual detail and as a symbol of a culture, superficially as a plot device and more profoundly as character revelation or as reinforcement of theme. When the allusion is to specific paintings by actual artists or to an artist's style or to that of a particular period, James's ideal of economical richness is most fully realized.¹⁷

Just as poetic nuances sometimes depend on a reader's recognition of a line or image from other poems, the effectiveness of this kind of art image in James depends on our having a sense of the particular qualities of the painting or style of painting alluded to. Moreover, as his art references reflect his own assumptions about artists and styles, which of course he by and large shared with his cultivated contemporaries, a knowledge of James's taste enhances our appreciation of the image. To know, for example, that he had a "sneaking relish"¹⁸ for Sassoferrato, "sneaking" because he considered him basically shallow, an essentially decorative artist, like Decamps, who

¹⁵ See *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*, ed. Mildred Howells (Garden City, 1928), I, 175.

¹⁶ *Travelling Companions* (New York, 1919), p. 20.

¹⁷ There is a discussion of James's use of Italian art for background and imagery in Robert L. Gale, "Henry James and Italy," *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, xiv (Sept. 1959), 157–171. Gale does not analyze in any detail the contextual significance of particular art images.

¹⁸ *The Painter's Eye*, p. 58.

lacked the “penetrating imagination” of a Tintoretto or a Delacroix, adds sharpness to the point made in *Roderick Hudson* that this is the one picture which Christina Light and her mother own and display. Fond though he was of the Dutch and Flemish school, James associated “style” in the grand manner with French and Italian art. Thus, Maria Gostrey’s “little Dutch-looking dining room” with its “ideally kept pewter” and “specimens of vivid Delf” (NY, xxii, 319) speaks for the kind of haven she has to offer Strether. Mme. de Vionnet’s “grayish-white salon” with its “fine *boiseries*, . . . medallions, mouldings, mirrors, great clear spaces” and “consular chairs,” “mythological bronzes,” “sphinxes’ heads” and “faded surfaces of satin striped with alternate silk” (NY, xxi, 244–245) symbolizes her quite different appeal to his imagination. Similarly, in *The Golden Bowl* Renaissance imagery underscores “the grand style” of the Prince and Charlotte and classical imagery, the idealism of Maggie and Adam, a reflection of what these art styles represented to James. Appreciation of Italian pre-Raphaelite painting is usually in a story or novel by James a sign of cultivation or an aesthetic temperament: both the diarist and the young man in “The Diary of a Man of Fifty” like the early Florentines best of all; the painter-hero in “Mrs. Temperly” thinks her daughter was “like a figure on the *predella* of an early Italian painting” (NS, xxvi, 269). As an Englishman of his type would, Sir Claude, the step-father in *What Maisie Knew*, regards a taste for primitives as a “silly superstition” (NY, xi, 112). Seicento art is generally admired by people without taste: the gentleman painter of “The Sweetheart of M. Briseux” is doomed to fail if for no other reason than because of his admiration for Guido and Caravaggio. No one but a conventional English gentleman like Sir Arthur in “The Siege of London” could feel indifferent to French painting and prefer instead the art exhibitions at the Royal Academy.

James’s artistry as a novelist and sensitivity as an art appreciator are revealed in the precision with which he selected particular art objects to express shades of meaning. One is rather surprised at first that Henrietta Stackpole’s favorite painting should be the tender, almost sentimental *Virgin Adoring the Child* by Correggio in the Uffizi. But on second thought, doesn’t this unexpected preference of hers reveal that for all her crisp, official feminism she has a more personal, feminine side, that side which is expressed in her loyalty to Isabel? But it is *The Wings of the Dove*

that deserves the most attention for the rich allusiveness of its art imagery.

The moment when Milly Theale stands before the Bronzino portrait which she is said to resemble marks a climax that has often been critically analyzed. But if we look at the particular Bronzino James described and consider its qualities, we can gain new insight into this passage. First of all, however, we must go back a few pages to the beginning of the Fifth Book which opens with Milly’s “agreeably inward response to the scene.” “The great historic house had, for Milly, beyond terrace and garden, as the centre of an almost extravagantly grand Watteau-composition, a tone as of old gold kept ‘down’ by the quality of the air, summer full-flushed, but attuned to the general perfect taste” (NY, xix, 208).

Carried throughout this chapter and the next is her sense of the occasion as a Watteau picture. “The largeness of style was the great containing vessel, while everything else, . . . became but this or that element of the infusion. . . . Everything was great, of course, in great pictures, and it was doubtless precisely a part of the brilliant life—since the brilliant life, as one had faintly figured it, just *was* humanly led—that all impressions within its area partook of its brilliancy.” For Milly the Matcham reception is “the revelation” of her personal success—the “parenthesis” in her life which had begun with the dinner three weeks ago at Lancaster Gate and which “would close with this admirable picture” (NY, xix, 209–210). Evocative of the delicacy of Watteau, though by no means descriptive of his palette, is the interwoven blue and pink and lavender color imagery: “they were all swimming together in the blue”; Lord Mark was “personally the note of the blue”; people “in your wonderful country” seem to be kept in “lavender and pink paper,” Aunt Maud says to Milly; Lady Aldershaw “was all in the palest pinks and blues.” And when Milly stands before the picture “the beauty and the history and the facility and the splendid midsummer glow” melt together in her consciousness: “it was a sort of magnificent maximum, the pink dawn of an apotheosis coming so curiously soon” (NY, xix, 213–223).

Is there any other metaphor that could have conveyed as well the feeling of Milly’s response to the Matcham festivity? Watteau’s special subject was the revels of an aristocratic society—the garden party and the feast of love. His settings represent the atmosphere of the park opening into the depths of a misty expanse; the mood

evoked is one of gaiety and refined pleasure. In a review of the Wallace Collection in 1873, James commented on Watteau's "perpetual grace," his "elegance and innocence combined," his "irresistible air of believing in these visionary picnics." His canvases are peopled by "gentle folks all" and he "marks the high-water point of natural elegance."¹⁹ In comparing the scene to a "Watteau-composition," Milly is seeing it as a picture of social intercourse at its highest pitch. Her vision of English society, the Watteau image suggests, is an idealization; from another point of view, for example that of Densher's, instead of "natural elegance," English society seems most to exhibit "natural stupidity." And its predatory nature, based as it is on a system in which everyone "works" everyone else, is a theme running throughout the book. Milly is not unaware of the jungle aspects of the social struggle; even in the Matcham scene, she perceives how Mrs. Lauder, "a natural force," is "working" Lord Mark; but the point is that it is the beauty of the scene, all of its elements fusing into a picture of high civilization, that she responds to.

But if the Matcham occasion was for her "then and afterwards a high-water mark of the imagination" (NY, XIX, 210), it is when she is brought by Lord Mark face to face with her "sister" in the Bronzino picture that she has her moment of supreme realization.

Perhaps it was her tears that made it just then so strange and fair—as wonderful as he had said: the face of a young woman, all splendidly drawn, down to the hands, and splendidly dressed; a face almost livid in hue, yet handsome in sadness, and crowned with a mass of hair, rolled back and high, that must, before fading with time, have had a family resemblance to her own. The lady in question, at all events, with her slight Michael-angelesque squareness, her eyes of other days, her full lips, her long neck, her recorded jewels, her brocaded and wasted reds, was a very great personage—only unaccompanied by a joy. And she was dead, dead, dead. Milly recognized her exactly in words that had nothing to do with her. "I shall never be better than this." (NY, XIX, 221)

Lord Mark misunderstands, thinking that by "this" she is referring to the picture. But still, "It was probably as good a moment as she should ever have with him. It was perhaps as good a moment as she should have with any one, or have in any connexion whatever" (NY, XIX, 221). In spite of all of her richness and splendor, the "personage" in the picture is "unaccompanied by a joy" and dead. Through Milly's identification with her, she at one and the same time feels most fully and sharply the possibilities

of life and has the strongest premonition of her doom. But paradoxically, the portrait of the dead woman that has itself endured, also seems to urge her to assert her will to live: " 'I can go for a long time.' Milly spoke with her eyes again on her painted sister's—almost as if under their suggestion. She still sat there before Kate, yet not without a light in her face. 'That will be one of my advantages. I think I could die without its being noticed' " (NY, XIX, 227–228).

In selecting a Bronzino portrait rather than, for instance, a Titian or a Vandyke, James again reveals his sensitivity to overtone and his preference for the "full-fed statement." A Titian portrait would suggest splendor and a Vandyke elegance and refinement, but with neither could Milly so readily have identified. It is very likely that James actually had in mind the portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi in the Uffizi;²⁰ his description in spirit and in detail is remarkably "like." The hair, the neck, the richness of dress, the large hands are all there. The "recorded jewels" may refer to the legend inscribed on her green beads—"Amour dure sans fin," not inappropriate as an inscription to *The Wings of the Dove*. But what are the particular qualities of the painting that make it an effective symbol? As is generally true of Bronzino's portraits, the social position of the sitter is apparent: the long nose, the long, thin fingers, the richness of clothing and jewels, the magnificent apartness created by placing the figure in front of a dark background with only a suggestion of an arch or niche—all these characteristics establish the high social status of the subject. However, the painting is not merely a representation of a distinguished, cultivated, and elegant woman. The arms gracefully follow the lines of the body, the right hand touching lightly an open book (as if the sitter had just looked up and was holding her place), the left resting on the arm of the chair. But there is a tautness in the fingers, a slight strain in the posture of the figure, giving an impression of some repressed inner agitation; the stillness and repose are qualified by the imperfectly hidden tension. Almost all of Bronzino's men and women have this air of strain, reserve, containment—a general characteristic of the Mannerists, who in reaction against the Renaissance celebration of the beauty and vigor of the human body, expressed in their works the spiritual unease of the sixteenth century, its lack of faith in mankind

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁰ This identification was made by Miriam Allott, "The Bronzino Portrait in *The Wings of the Dove*," *MLN*, LXVIII (Jan. 1953), 23–25.

and matter. Typically Mannerist, Bronzino's figures are elongated and distorted; his people appear both over-graceful and ascetic, worldly and spiritual, elegant and sad. What has been said of his men can also be applied to this Panciaticchi portrait: "It is an aristocracy alike of the intellect and the senses that Bronzino has immortalized for us. These men of the Florentine decadence are no mere representatives of a thin refinement of culture. They have known everything and felt everything. They are beyond good and evil."²¹

Coming after the Watteau image, which conjures up a delicious imaginary world exempt from time and pain, good and evil, the Bronzino becomes a symbol of mortality; the elegance and splendor incompletely mask an all-pervading sadness and sense of mutability.

The Veronese images in the Venetian chapters also illustrate the special economy and richness of particular art references. The descriptions of Palazzo Leporelli are largely based on the Palazzo Barbaro, a fourteenth-century Gothic structure, on the Grand Canal, opposite the Accademia di Belle Arti. James described it as a "magnificent house—a place of which the full charm only sinks into your spirit as you go on living there, seeing it in all its hours and phases."²² The owners were his friends the Daniel Curtises, with whom he stayed in 1887—this visit was originally planned to last ten days but was extended to five weeks—as well as in the 1890's. Enshrined in *The Wings of the Dove* are James's impressions of its "pompous Tiepolo ceiling," Gothic windows, and court with a high outer staircase.²³ Perhaps through association the Veronese images sprang to mind; according to a painting representing the interior of one of the Palazzo Barbaro salons there were at the turn of the century two Veroneses—*The Rape of the Sabines* and *The Continnence of Scipio*—on its walls.²⁴ But we do not have to try to seek a specific source for the image; James was introduced to this painter of sumptuous feasts and splendid decorations on his first visit to Venice. "Never was a painter more nobly joyous, never did an artist take a greater delight in life, seeing it all as a kind of breezy festival and feeling it through the medium of perpetual success," James wrote of his wall paintings in the Ducal Palace. Of his famous *Rape of Europa*, he said, "Nowhere else in art is such a temperament revealed; never did inclination and opportunity combine to express such enjoyment. The mixture of flowers and gems and brocade, of blooming flesh and shining sea and waving groves, of

youth, health, movement, desire—all this is the brightest vision that ever descended upon the soul of a painter."²⁵

It is in Chapter xxviii, Milly's "occasion" in honor of Sir Luke Strett, that the Veronese allusions are clustered.²⁶ James probably did not have any single Veronese painting in mind, nor is the scene presented in any literal sense as if it were a composite picture. On one level the association of Veronese with the scene contributes to the atmosphere of grandeur and splendor in which Milly is making her life. As the Princess, she was "lodged for the first time as she ought, from her type, to be," according to Susan Stringham. "It's a Veronese picture, as near as can be—with me as the inevitable dwarf, the small blackamoor, put into a corner of the foreground for effect" (as in Veronese's *Feast at the House of Levi*,²⁷ in which a jester, both a dwarf and a blackamoor, crouches on the staircase in the foreground). Densher wonders what part he is to play, "with his attitude that lacked the highest style, in a composition in which everything else would have it?" Mrs. Stringham informs him that he is "in the picture"—he is to be "the grand young man who surpasses the others and holds up his head and the wine-cup" (NY, xx, 206–207), (the pose of the cupbearer in the *Marriage at Cana* in the Louvre). Later, after dinner, Densher feels "the effect of the place, the beauty of the scene" acting to transform the guests, who "during the day had fingered their Baedekers, gaped at their frescoes, and differed, over fractions of francs, with their gondoliers," into figures not out of place in a Veronese canvas. "Milly, let loose among them in a wonderful white dress, brought them somehow into relation with something that made them more finely

²¹ Arthur McComb, *Agnolo Bronzino, His Life and Works* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 9.

²² *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock (New York, 1920), I, 127.

²³ His memory of the 1887 visit is recorded in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*. See *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 135–136.

²⁴ This painting, which is in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, is by Walter A. Gay. Sargent's *Interior of a Palazzo in Venice* is of the grand sala of the Palazzo Barbaro. With its representation of figures (the Daniel Curtises, their son and his wife) in informal poses, this picture could be a frontispiece to one of James's depictions of "modern" life in a sumptuous old world setting.

²⁵ *Portraits of Places* (Boston, 1884), pp. 29–30.

²⁶ For a brilliant interpretation of analogies between essentially the subjects of Veronese's paintings and this scene, see Laurence B. Holland, "The Wings of the Dove," *ELH*, xxvi (Dec. 1959), 549–574.

²⁷ James mentions seeing this painting in "From Chambéry to Milan," *Transatlantic Sketches* (Boston, 1875), p. 76.

genial: so that if the Veronese picture of which he had talked with Mrs. Stringham was not quite constituted, the comparative prose of the previous hours, the traces of insensibility qualified by 'beating down' were at last almost nobly disowned" (NY, xx, 213). Milly acquits herself as a hostess "under some supreme idea, an inspiration which was half her nerves and half an inevitable harmony" (NY, xx, 214), so well that the Veronese image is almost apt. But while Milly's "festival" represents an active affirmation of her desire and will to live, to live in the Veronese style, the climax of this scene is Densher's extortion from Kate at last of what it is Kate expects him to do—" 'Since she's to die I'm to marry her?' . . . 'To marry her.' . . . 'So that when her death has taken place I shall in the natural course have money?' . . . 'You'll in the natural course have money. We shall in the natural course be free' " (NY, xx, 225). Veronese's huge pictures—described by Bernard Berenson as "cheerful," "simple," "displaying childlike naturalness of feeling" and "frank and joyous worldliness"²⁸—are pitched in quite a different key. As can be seen, the association of Milly's occasion with a Veronese canvas is also highly ironic, an irony which becomes apparent only in the light of what Veronese as a painter represents.

Judging by the pictorial effects in his fiction, we must conclude that James's cultivation of his visual sense yielded him rich rewards as a novelist. His poetic allusions to works of art, framing of scenes through pictorial metaphor, evocations of natural scenery, cityscapes, and portraits of people testify to the sharpness and delicacy of his visual perceptions, the depth of his response to art works, and the power of his visual memory. But to what extent and in what way did particular painters influence his writing? This is an extremely difficult, if not impossible, question to answer. There are between the arts, as Wallace Stevens said, "migratory passings to and fro, quickenings, Promethean liberations and discoveries,"²⁹ but the attempt to isolate an unequivocal "passage" of painting into writing with regard to technique as well as to subject or theme more often than not results in absurd analogizing. The inescapable fact remains that there are clear boundaries between the arts and that at best what one artist can achieve is a virtual effect of another medium.

James's images and descriptive passages occasionally are traceable to specific paintings, as was seen with the Bronzino. Other examples

can be cited. Hyacinth Robinson's vision of the plebeian Millicent Henning "(if there should ever be barricades in the streets of London) with a red cap of liberty on her head and her white throat bared so that she should be able to shout the louder the Marseillaise of that hour" (NY, v, 164), calls to mind Delacroix's famous *Le 28 Juillet, La Liberté conduisant le peuple aux barricades*, which James, who admired Delacroix above all other nineteenth-century painters, could not have missed seeing in the Louvre. The red-capped figure of Liberty, as Walter Friedlaender observes, "is no allegory, but a *femme du peuple* with bared breast and blowing hair, holding a flintlock and waving the tricolor."³⁰ Hyacinth hardly seems sensual enough even to imagine Millicent with her bosom exposed, but the effect is suggested by "white throat bared." The sentence that follows contributes further to the likeness: "If the festival of the Goddess of Reason should ever be enacted in the British Capital . . . who was better designated than Miss Henning to figure in a grand statuesque manner as the heroine of the occasion?" (NY, v, 164–165) (The sad, introverted, rather delicately featured young man in the foreground, somewhat dwarfed by the monumental figure of Liberty, could be for all the world a representation of Hyacinth!)

Similarly, the narrator's allusion in *The Aspern Papers* to Sardanapalus—he fears that Miss Bordereau like that Eastern potentate will burn her treasures before she dies—probably originated in James's remembrance of Delacroix's *Sardanapalus*, which greatly impressed him when he first saw it in 1876³¹ rather than Byron's. Likewise, this image in *The Golden Bowl* may very well have had its source in a recollection of a painting: Maggie "saw as in a picture" why she had not given in to "the vulgar heat of her wrong." "The straight vindictive view, the rages of jealousy, the protests of passion"—these were "a range of feeling" which "figured nothing nearer to experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it

²⁸ *Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York, 1957), pp. 47–48.

²⁹ "The Relations between Poetry and Painting," *The Necessary Angel* (New York, 1951), p. 169.

³⁰ *David to Delacroix*, trans. Robert Goldwater (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), p. 113.

³¹ See *The Painter's Eye*, p. 113.

reached her and plunging into other defiles" (NY, xxiv, 237). Oriental subjects were a staple of romantic literature as well as of painting, but I think the image came not from a source such as *Salammô* but from James's memory of a work by Decamps. "The picturesqueness—we might almost say the grotesqueness—of the East no one has rendered like Decamps," James wrote in an art review of 1873. He "paints movements to perfection; the animated gorgeousness of his famous 'Arabs Fording a Stream' (a most powerful piece of water-colour) is a capital proof."³² The striking feature of the painting which connects it with James's image is that it represents a moving file of Arabs on horseback, bristling with spears, seeming to come directly at the spectator but in the foreground veering to the right in order to cross the stream at the ford.

A reasonable case can be made for the visual sources of these images, but it should be noted that each image, which we necessarily see with our mind's eye, is only one stroke in James's canvas whereas the assumed prototype may have literary and historical meaning but is essentially self-contained and appeals directly to the viewer's visual and tactile senses. Even more important, though James showed a remarkable ability to suggest the spirit of individual art works, it is the subject that is "transposed" into fiction; the technique of describing a scene as a picture is intrinsically different from that of painting it.

In my analysis of the Lambinet passage, I tried to show how James's word choice and syntax were attuned to the conveying of sensation and thus produced the effect of an Impressionist vision of the scene. It seems to me highly probable that James's knowledge of Impressionist painting influenced his way of seeing, but only indirectly could it have affected his way of rendering in prose an Impressionist scene, or any other. His was almost to begin with, a picturesque vision; that is, he responded to the play of light and shadow, color and movement detached from the object. The Impressionists, who carried the tendency in painting to detach appearance from object to an extreme and who came to realize that the areas of an object in shadow are not devoid of color or darker than the rest of it but only not as bright, may very well have increased his awareness of atmospheric effects and of the influence of light on color. Through their treatment of contemporary life, he may have come to realize the inherent pictorial qualities of scenes such as the one described at the end of the

Lambinet chapter. The scene in which Strether and Mme. de Vionnet have luncheon together in the restaurant on the quay in its treatment of textures, light, and color and in the informality of Mme. de Vionnet's pose could have been a description in subject and tone of an early Renoir canvas, as F. O. Matthiessen has suggested.

But the proper place to look for possible influences on James's descriptive technique is in the works of Turgenev, Flaubert, Daudet, Loti. However, the similarities between James's style of "the major phase" and French literary impressionism is a subject for another study. My point is that if we are concerned with discovering affinities and influences in matters of technique, we have ample evidence here of this kind of relationship in the works of his immediate literary predecessors and contemporaries. Undoubtedly an artist's perceptions of reality, of which his way of seeing the physical world is an important part, shape his method of expression: when inherited techniques are inadequate to express the new vision, new techniques must be created. And in his view of the interrelatedness of all experience, of consciousness not as fixed and stable but as ever in flux, and in his emphasis on the subjective aspects of experience, James had much in common with the Impressionist painter's response to reality. This summary of the Impressionist painter's view of the world could very well be used to characterize one aspect of James's:

A world, the phenomena of which are in a state of constant flux and transition, produces the impression of a continuum in which everything coalesces, and in which there are no differences but the various approaches and point of view of the beholder. An art in accordance with such a world will stress not merely the momentary nature of phenomena, will not see in man simply the measure of all things, but will seek the criterion of truth in the "hic et nunc" of the individual.³³

Both William Morris Hunt and John LaFarge had the Impressionist "eye," though they did not practice the technique of the color spot, rainbow palette, broad brush stroke, and color perspective invented by Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, and the other members of the school, and through his associations with them in the Newport days James was exposed to their belief that "one should be alive to the crowding impressions of life, instead of arranging one's ideas in any defi-

³² Ibid., p. 74.

³³ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (New York, 1951), I, 873.

nite or schematic way."³⁴ But it seems to me that the similarity between James's and the Impressionists' perceptions of reality mainly suggests that James was also a man of his time.

More analogous in style, structure, and sensibility than Impressionist painting to James's mature work is Mannerist art. Again, let me make clear that I am not suggesting any direct transpositions or influences, but rather that his relation to Mannerist painting and sculpture is an instance of what Henri Focillon speaks of as

affinities and accords far more subtle than those which preside over the general historical groupings of mankind. There exists a kind of spiritual ethnography which cuts across the best-defined "races." It is composed of families of the mind—families whose unity is effected by secret ties, and who are faithfully in communication with one another, beyond all restrictions of time or place. Perhaps each style, each state of a style, even each technique seeks out by preference a certain state of man's nature, a certain spiritual family. In any case, it is the relationships between these three values which clarifies a work of art not only as something that is unique but also as something that is a living word in a universal language.³⁵

Before we turn to the qualities of James's art which place him in this "spiritual" family, a brief review of the main characteristics of Mannerist art is in order.³⁶ The Mannerist style developed in reaction to the High Renaissance ideal of isolation and balance of parts, as reflected most purely in the works of Raphael's mature period. Once thought merely to represent a decay of the Renaissance idea, it is now recognized as a separate style which in painting was fully formed by 1520, by 1550 had degenerated, and by 1590 was sterile and conventionalized.

In Renaissance art, the object in nature was subordinate to established canons of proportion and harmony; it was to be treated not as an optical impression, but as "heightened and idealized to something objective and regular."³⁷ In contrast, the Mannerist approached nature subjectively, defying established rules of perspective, proportion, and composition. For the Mannerist it was not a question of creating the object as one might or should or does see it, but as, to quote Friedlaender, "from purely autonomous artistic motives, one would have it seen."³⁸ Not attempting to represent the object according to what would be viewed as "natural," the Mannerist stretched limbs and fingers, broke up symmetry, dissolved figures in space—all for the sake of a particular personal rhythmic feeling of beauty. As exemplified by the works of Parmigianino, Tintoretto, Bronzino,

the Michelangelo of the Medici Chapel and of the anteroom of the Laurentian Library, Mannerist art lacks both the repose and stability of the Renaissance and the turbulent struggle and triumphant resolution of the baroque; it is an art of preciousness, of intricate asymmetrical patterns leading to no final solution, of subjects treated from unexpected angles, of "rigid formality and deliberate disturbance, bareness and over-decoration."³⁹

Various theories have been offered to explain the development of the Mannerist style, but the most widely accepted seems to be that it was an expression not merely of dissatisfaction with the perfection of Renaissance art but of the spiritual ferment of the times. As Hans Tietze observes in reference to Tintoretto's emphasis of material phenomena to express spiritual meanings, "The Renaissance affirmed and achieved reality both in life and in art. The period which followed it endeavoured to discern in this dominated reality an image of metaphysical essence."⁴⁰

The quality in James's art which has led to his being called a "romantic metaphysical" by T. S. Eliot,⁴¹ an "idealistic realist" by Joseph Warren Beach,⁴² and a seeker of "the sacramental sensibility" by R. W. B. Lewis⁴³ is what relates him to the Mannerist tendency to spiritualize the material world. This is not to say that James was religious in a traditional or formal sense, nor even that he was an adherent of his father's idiosyncratic version of Swedenborgianism as Quentin Anderson maintains, but that for him the soul in the sense of man's moral,

³⁴ Edward E. Hale, "The Impressionism of Henry James," *Faculty Papers of Union College*, II (Jan. 1931), 17. Hale points out that James had much in common with the Impressionist sensibility, but he does not attempt to analyze specific Impressionist characteristics of his work.

³⁵ *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler (New York, 1948), p. 15.

³⁶ My discussion of Mannerist art is based largely on Walter Friedlaender, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (New York, 1957); Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Architecture of Mannerism," *The Mint, A Miscellany of Literature, Art and Criticism*, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London, 1946), pp. 116-138; and I. L. Zupnik, "The 'Aesthetics' of the Early Mannerists," *Art Bulletin*, xxxv (Dec. 1953), 302-306.

³⁷ Friedlaender, p. 5.

³⁸ P. 6.

³⁹ Pevsner, p. 136.

⁴⁰ *Tintoretto, The Paintings and Drawings* (New York, 1948), p. 44.

⁴¹ "Note sur Mallarmé et Poe," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, xxvii (Nov. 1926), 525.

⁴² *The Method of Henry James* (Philadelphia, 1954), lxxxvii.

⁴³ "The Vision of Grace: James's *The Wings of the Dove*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, III (Spring 1957), 34.

intellectual, affective life was eminently real. His works represent the attempt to objectify the travails or the creation of the finer conscience, to make vivid and immediate the adventures of the spirit. Not born in a society rich enough in manners and social institutions to engage his imagination and unable to become immersed in the life of an alien culture, at least not in the sense that George Eliot and Balzac were in theirs, he converted his preternatural sensitivity to surface appearances into an instrument for the revelation of moral meanings. In his preface to *The Tragic Muse* James mentions that in pondering over the problem of how to unify his two separate stories—"his political case" and "his theatrical case"—he asked himself, "Were there not . . . certain sublime Tintoretto's at Venice, a measureless Crucifixion in especial, which showed half a dozen actions separately taking place? Yes, this might be, but there has surely been nevertheless a mighty pictorial fusion, so that the virtue of composition had somehow thereby come all mysteriously to its own."⁴⁴ But there is another sense, pertinent to our discussion here, in which, as shown in this quotation from an early essay, "fusion" in Tintoretto spoke to James's imagination:

Before his greatest works you are conscious of a sudden evaporation of old doubts and dilemmas, and the eternal problem of the conflict between idealism and realism dies the most natural of deaths. In Tintoret, the problem is practically solved, and the alternatives so harmoniously interfused that I defy the keenest critic to say where one begins and the other ends. The homeliest prose melts into the most ethereal poetry, and the literal and imaginative fairly confound their identity.⁴⁵

The parallel in James's art to this Mannerist characteristic of Tintoretto, who as Tietze said "makes form dissolve into matter and matter into form,"⁴⁶ is his masterly "interfusion" of psychological nuances with descriptions of things, so that through the inanimate thing the essence of the spiritual reality is revealed. However, both James's tortuous, involuted later style and Tintoretto's twisted lines and tormented restless forms reflect an unresolved tension in their exaltation of physical and psychical existence.

The irresoluteness of James's endings is suggestive of the Mannerist style—the struggle to repose which lacks a final triumph. By irresoluteness I do not mean that James's works are not rounded off, self-contained works of art, but rather that one is often left with a disturbed feeling because the "solution" is rarely presented

with finality. Isabel Archer returns to Rome, but why and to what? Nick Dormer has indeed given up the political life for the artistic, but is his painting of Julia Dallow a sign that he will become the fashionable success that Gabriel Nash predicted? In her renunciation of Owen Gereth and the spoils of Poynton, Fleda Vetch remains true to her finer instincts, but what does Owen's wish for her to have a valuable object from Poynton show about his feelings concerning her moral decision?

This ambiguity is partially attributable to James's approach to subject. In an essay on Flaubert, James stated that the novelist may stand in two different relations to his subject and the treatment of it: "The more he feels his subject the more he *can* render it—that is the first way. The more he renders it the more he *can* feel it—that is the second way."⁴⁷ The second way was not only Flaubert's, but the evidence of the notebooks and the prefaces alone testifies to its being James's way as well.

Ever aware though he was of the necessity that fiction be in touch with life, James created his motives for behavior as he worked out his subject, subordinating questions about human actions and emotions that other novelists might feel compelled to treat to his larger artistic purpose. In the detailed work sheets for *The Spoils of Poynton* in the notebooks, for example, Owen's marital fate was a foregone conclusion. As the focus was to be on Fleda's consciousness, his subsequent happiness or misery was inconsequential. As with the Mannerist painter, it is not "nature" as seen by the ordinary person or by the conventions of another art style that was his concern but rather "nature" as he "would have it seen." Hence the superintelligence and hypersensitivity of James's characters; the probing dialectical conversations which in real life one cannot imagine sustained by even the most perceptive and highly cultivated beings; the omission except through implication of physical drives and passions. What James said in an essay of 1892 about Tintoretto's *Marriage of Cana* at the Salute is applicable here: "There could be no better example of the roving independence of the painter's vision, a real spirit of adventure for which his subject was always a cluster of accidents; not an obvious order, but a sort of peopled and agitated chapter of life, in which the figures

⁴⁴ *The Art of the Novel*, p. 84.

⁴⁵ *Transatlantic Sketches*, pp. 91–92.

⁴⁶ *Tintoretto*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ *The Future of the Novel, Essays on the Art of Fiction*, ed. Leon Edel (New York, 1956), p. 156.

are submissive pictorial notes."⁴⁸ For both painter and novelist, the "schemata" came first; the "figures" from life are treated as elements in the composition, subordinated to the prevailing artistic rhythm.

James's late style can be called either mannered or Mannerist, depending on whether one views his hesitations and qualifications, his inversions and twisting of syntax, his mingling of literary with colloquial language as an artifice masking an emptiness of content or as a mode of expression reflecting his painstaking effort to communicate with precision refinements of feeling and thought. The mannered style cannot always be easily distinguished from the Mannerist: when a figure in a painting is represented scratching his left ear with the right hand, his arm extended over his head, this may be either a cliché of the style and hence empty of meaning or it may be the only possible way within a design to express a mood. One can in James point out instances in which the style is a beautifully wrought carapace covering a lowly crustacean, but on the whole his late style represents an effort to penetrate meanings deeply and subtly. But while this working out of detail "with a goldsmith's care . . . makes for an enormous gain in insight and precision . . . the total effect is frequently lost sight of."⁴⁹ James himself did not lose sight of the "total effect," but though he had a classical feeling for balance and proportion, his tendency toward elaboration often resulted in works with the "misplaced middle"—overdevelopment in the first half which necessitated radical foreshortening in the second. This asymmetry and preciousness in detail is characteristic of both Mannerist architecture and painting.

As this brief analysis of the Mannerist traits of James's art suggests, Mannerist style is accompanied by a particular sensibility, one which may cherish the ideals of a classical serenity and harmony but which, living in an age of uncertainty and disruption of traditional values, must create out of its own consciousness order and beauty. That James possessed this kind of sensibility I think few will question, and that he felt an affinity for Mannerist art as represented chiefly by Tintoretto is also evident.⁵⁰ As to specific "influences" of the Mannerists on

James's style and structure, objective evidence is hard to come by. There is a common frontier of the arts, but communications between the outposts are couched in a language not easy to translate. It is in his pictorialism that the transformation of his visual art experiences into literature can be most clearly seen. But to enter deeply into James's art of the novel, one cannot ignore either the manifest or the latent results of his having cultivated long, lovingly and well the art of seeing.⁵¹

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⁴⁸ *Italian Hours* (Boston and New York, 1909), pp. 49–50.

⁴⁹ Giorgio Melchiori, *The Tightrope Walkers: Studies of Mannerism in Modern English Literature* (London, 1956), p. 23. Melchiori considers James a precursor of a twentieth-century Mannerist style.

⁵⁰ James's taste was eclectic, but it is apparent from letters and essays that the two artists who meant the most to him were Tintoretto and Michelangelo of the Medici chapel. In an unpublished letter to Charles Eliot Norton, dated 9 August 1871, he said that he felt, more so than was true of any other art works, except perhaps those of Michelangelo's, that Tintoretto's aroused emotions which had worked themselves permanently into the substance of his mind. On his second visit to Italy, he "still found Carpaccio delightful, Veronese magnificent, Titian supremely beautiful and Tintoretto altogether unqualifiable" (*Transatlantic Sketches*, p. 90). This evaluation, indicating that his was not merely a youthful enthusiasm for this Mannerist painter, appeared in an essay first published in 1892: "The plastic arts may have less to say to us than in the hungry years of youth, and the celebrated picture in general be more of a blank; but more than the others any fine Tintoret still carries us back, calling up not only the rich particular vision but the freshness of the old wonder. Many things come and go, but this great artist remains for us in Venice a part of the company of the mind. The others are there in their obvious glory, but he is the only one for whom the imagination, in our expressive modern phrase, sits up" (*Italian Hours*, p. 49). Further measure of his feeling for Tintoretto can be taken by the order he gave in 1901 to the Venice bound Edmund Gosse: "Go to see the Tintoretto Crucifixion at San Cossiano [Cassano]—or never more be officer of mine" (*Letters*, I, 378). Apparently he had not disavowed his earlier opinion that in this Crucifixion Tintoretto had "advanced to the uttermost limit of painting; that beyond this another art—inspired poetry—begins, and that Bellini, Veronese, Giorgione, and Titian, all joining hands and straining every muscle of their genius, reach forward not so far but that they leave a visible space in which Tintoret alone is master" (*Transatlantic Sketches*, p. 90).

⁵¹ I am grateful to the American Association of University Women for a National Fellowship (1957–58) enabling me to work on a study of which this article is one result.